

acknowledge the many contributions that minority-owned banks have provided to individuals, businesses and communities for generations. I also extend my sincerest congratulations to Citizens Bank for its 100 years of service to the people of my district and offer my best wishes for another prosperous century of service.

#### AN INSULT TO OUR SOLDIERS

#### HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, March 23, 2004*

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, earlier this month the New York Times published an opinion piece on payroll system problems in the military—specifically in our National Guard. The piece quoted a letter from a soldier in my district, SGT Daniel Romero, who was killed in an explosion in Kandahar, Afghanistan, nearly two years ago.

In a letter to a fellow sergeant, Sergeant Romero wrote, “Are they really fixing pay issues [or] are they putting them off until we return? If they are waiting, then what happens to those who (God forbid) don’t make it back?”

Sergeant Romero was referring to payment problems that he and his fellow soldiers had experienced. In a November 2003 report that studied the payroll processes of six Army National Guard units called up to active duty, GAO found—among other things—that some soldiers did not receive payments for up to six months after mobilization. Payment problems are not limited to the Guard, but as my colleague Representative SHAYS pointed out, the payroll process is antiquated, designed for a time when members of the Guard were not often called up to active duty.

The following piece asks an important question: “As we mobilize troops from around the country and send them off to fight and possibly die in that crucible of terror known as combat, is it too much to ask that they be paid in a timely way?”

SGT Daniel Romero died for our country. He was a brave and dedicated soldier who proudly served when his nation called on him to fight in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

It is the very least we can do to ensure we work as hard for soldiers like SGT Romero as they work for us. That’s why I believe that fixing these payment problems should be an immediate priority for the Department of Defense.

[From the New York Times, Mar. 15, 2004]

#### AN INSULT TO OUR SOLDIERS

(By Bob Herbert)

Tom Davis, a Virginia Republican, is chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform. He tells a story about Sergeant Daniel Romero of the Colorado Army National Guard, who was sent to fight in Afghanistan.

In a letter dated March 23, 2002, Sergeant Romero asked a fellow sergeant: “Are they really fixing pay issues [or] are they putting them off until we return? If they are waiting, then what happens to those who (God forbid) don’t make it back?”

As Mr. Davis said at a hearing this past January, “Sergeant Romero was killed in action in Afghanistan in April 2002.” The congressman added, “I would really like to hear

today that his family isn’t wasting their time and energy fixing errors in his pay.”

As we mobilize troops from around the country and send them off to fight and possibly die in that crucible of terror known as combat, is it too much to ask that they be paid in a timely way?

Researchers from the General Accounting Office, a nonpartisan investigative arm of Congress, studied the payroll processes of six Army National Guard units that were called up to active duty. What they found wasn’t pretty.

There were significant pay problems in all six units. A report released last November said, “Some soldiers did not receive payments for up to six months after mobilization and others still had not received certain payments by the conclusion of our audit work.”

This is exactly the kind of thing that servicemen and women, especially those dealing with the heightened anxiety of life in a war zone, do not need. Maj. Kenneth Chavez of the Colorado National Guard told a Congressional committee of the problems faced by the unit he commanded:

“All 62 soldiers encountered pay problems. . . . During extremely limited phone contact, soldiers called home only to find families in chaos because of the inability to pay bills due to erroneous military pay.”

These problems are not limited to the National Guard. But one of the reasons the Guard has been especially hard hit is that, in the words of another congressman, Christopher Shays, its payroll system is “old and leaky and antiquated,” designed for an era when the members of the Guard were seen as little more than weekend warriors.

That system has been unable to cope with widespread call-ups to extended periods of active duty and deployment to places in which personnel qualify for a variety of special pay and allowances, particularly in combat zones.

The G.A.O. report said, “Four Virginia Special Forces soldiers who were injured in Afghanistan and unable to resume their civilian jobs experienced problems in receiving entitled active duty pay and related health care.”

The country is asking for extraordinary—in some cases, supreme—sacrifices from the military, and then failing to meet its own responsibility to provide such basic necessities as pay and health care.

“The military knows that it’s really blown it,” said Mr. Shays, who heads a subcommittee of the Government Reform Committee. He noted that National Guard and military reserve units were given enhanced roles in the aftermath of the cold war. But the payroll systems (and some other basic functions) were not upgraded accordingly.

“This is a huge problem,” he said.

And it is not likely to be solved soon.

“Anything that could be done in the short term is kind of like Band-Aids, things that will hopefully result in fewer errors but will not fix the problem,” said Gregory Kutz, who supervised the G.A.O. report.

A lasting solution to the pay problems, he said, will require a completely new system.

Defense Department officials insist they are working simultaneously on short-term fixes and the creation of a brand new system. Patrick Shine, acting director of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, told me that a 49-step “plan of action” has been developed in response to the G.A.O. report.

He said he hoped that a completely new payroll system could be unveiled in the spring of 2005.

I asked how confident he was about the deadline. “Well,” he said, “I’ll be very honest with you. I don’t think we’re all that different from private companies, seeing sometimes slippages in schedules.”

But he was optimistic, he said.

#### HONORING THE STATE CHAMPION LIVINGSTON ACADEMY LADY WILDCATS

#### HON. BART GORDON

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, March 23, 2004*

Mr. GORDON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Livingston Academy Lady Wildcats for winning this year’s Tennessee Class AA girls high school basketball championship. The March 13 win earned the Lady Wildcats their fourth state championship.

Such a feat deserves recognition. The team of highly motivated players went 37–3 this year, capping a championship season with a strong 50–38 win over a tough McMinn Central team. This is the fourth state championship in the past 14 years for the Lady Wildcats.

Livingston residents can be proud of the accomplishments of the Lady Wildcats, who won their first championship in 1990 when current head coach Lesley Smith was a player. Assistant coach Elizabeth Woodard was also a member of that first championship team. I commend the team for an outstanding season and a remarkable achievement.

The following are the members of the 2003–04 state champion Lady Wildcats: Katrina Beechboard, Krista Clinard, Ashley Matthews, Megan Thompson, Jada Ledbetter, Megan Brown, Mallie Stephens, Kristin Hoover, Kasey Baltimore, April Handy, Whitney Sells, Brittany McCain, Haley Mullins, Kellie Thurman and team managers Samantha Sidwell, Tiffany Livingston, Blair Hill and Amber Peck.

#### REMEMBERING MR. ATHAN GIBBS, INNOVATOR AND COMMITTED ADVOCATE OF DEMOCRACY, ON THE OCCASION OF HIS DEATH

#### HON. JIM COOPER

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, March 23, 2004*

Mr. COOPER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life of Mr. Athan Gibbs, of Nashville, Tennessee. Mr. Gibbs was a patriot, a pastor, and a visionary entrepreneur who took it upon himself to restore Americans’ faith in the democratic process after the disheartening controversy we experienced in November of 2000. Democracy lost one of its chief champions with Mr. Gibbs’ unexpected death on the morning of Sunday, March 14, and on behalf of Congressman RUSH HOLT and other colleagues, I send his family our heartfelt sympathy for their loss and deepest gratitude for his life.

A Memphis native who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s, Mr. Gibbs experienced first hand the struggle for equality at the voting booth. Four decades later, these seminal experiences informed his observations of the 2000 Florida election controversy, and drove him to invent a technology that would ensure the fair exercise of democracy—the first electronic voting system with a “paper trail” to allow voters to verify that their votes were appropriately logged and counted.